

set an override code in voice mail such that entering the code will send control of the call back to the mobile phone. When voice mail is entered a background override process is initiated that monitors **140** the initial keypad entries of the caller. The code can be given to other individuals at the user's discretion. When a caller reaches voice mail she can enter the pre-set code and control of the call will be returned to the mobile phone **145** to be processed as an override call. If no override code is entered, the voice mail feature functions normally **150**.

[0013] The override code allows the override feature to be activated even if an override number is not the originating number. This is important because a caregiver may not be able to call from a phone associated with an override number. The caller could be away from home or their mobile may have a dead battery. In such cases they must use another phone that is not associated with an override number to check in with the mobile user.

[0014] There can be multiple implementations to determine whether the originating number is an override number. The mobile phone can store a table or list of override numbers that can be edited by the mobile phone user. This table or list may be accessed when an incoming call is detected to determine whether to activate the override feature. Another implementation would be to include an override flag in the mobile phone's contact/phonebook feature. The mobile phone user could enable or disable an override flag for each contact in the phonebook. Thus, when a call comes in and the number is matched to one in the contact database, the override flag is checked and the override feature can be activated. A table/list of phone numbers would also include all permutations of the phone number including a 7 digit local call as well as a 10 or 11 digit out of area call. Thus, if the caller ID function displays the 7 digit number or a 10 or 11 digit number with area code attached, the override feature would still recognize the number. The same principle applies to phone numbers stored in the contact/phonebook database of the mobile phone. While this disclosure refers to standard U.S. telephone nomenclature, it can readily be adapted for use in other countries that utilize different telephone number nomenclatures.

[0015] There are times when the mobile user may wish to purposely deactivate the override feature. For instance, the user may wish to deactivate the feature during meetings or while at a theater, in a restaurant, or the like. If the user deactivates the override feature, then the mobile phone will not answer itself regardless of the originating phone number. Conversely, there may be times when the override feature will not be permitted to be deactivated. Caregivers may always want to be able to monitor those in their care. Similarly, parents may always want to be able to reach their teenage children. Thus, access to the override feature may be controlled by a code or personal identification number (PIN). That way, the person most interested in having access to the mobile user can control the override feature.

[0016] Computer program elements of the invention may be embodied in hardware and/or in software (including firmware, resident software, micro-code, etc.). The invention may take the form of a computer program product, which can be embodied by a computer-usable or computer-readable storage medium having computer-usable or com-

puter-readable program instructions, "code" or a "computer program" embodied in the medium for use by or in connection with the instruction execution system. In the context of this document, a computer-usable or computer-readable medium may be any medium that can contain, store, communicate, propagate, or transport the program for use by or in connection with the instruction execution system, apparatus, or device. The computer-usable or computer-readable medium may be, for example but not limited to, an electronic, magnetic, optical, electromagnetic, infrared, or semiconductor system, apparatus, device, or propagation medium such as the Internet. Note that the computer-usable or computer-readable medium could even be paper or another suitable medium upon which the program is printed, as the program can be electronically captured, via, for instance, optical scanning of the paper or other medium, then compiled, interpreted, or otherwise processed in a suitable manner. The computer program product and any software and hardware described herein form the various means for carrying out the functions of the invention in the example embodiments.

[0017] Specific embodiments of an invention are disclosed herein. One of ordinary skill in the art will readily recognize that the invention may have other applications in other environments. In fact, many embodiments and implementations are possible. The following claims are in no way intended to limit the scope of the present invention to the specific embodiments described above. In addition, any recitation of "means for" is intended to evoke a means-plus-function reading of an element and a claim, whereas, any elements that do not specifically use the recitation "means for", are not intended to be read as means-plus-function elements, even if the claim otherwise includes the word "means".

1. A method of automatically answering a mobile phone comprising:

receiving a call;

detecting the calling party's phone number using a caller ID function;

determining if the calling party's phone number has been flagged as a phone number capable of causing the mobile phone to answer itself; and

automatically answering the call if the calling party's phone number is flagged as a phone number capable of causing the mobile phone to answer itself.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the mobile phone answers itself only after a pre-set number of rings.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the step of determining if the calling party's phone number has been flagged as a phone number capable of causing the mobile phone to answer itself comprises:

accessing a table containing one or more phone number entries that have been identified as incoming calling phone numbers capable of causing the mobile phone to answer itself.

4. The method of claim 2 wherein the step of determining if the calling party's phone number has been flagged as a phone number capable of causing the mobile phone to answer itself comprises: